

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation Journal:
'Comparing the Buddhist Avalokiteswara's Descent into Hell with that
of Jesus Christ!'
Issue Eight

By Marilyn Hughes

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!
www.outofbodytravel.org



Avalokiteswara of Buddhism and Christ of Christianity
**(To have your Questions, Articles,
Poetry or Art included in future
editions, submit to:
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Having worked primarily in radio broadcasting, Marilyn Hughes spent several years as a news reporter, producer and anchor before deciding to stay at home with her three children. She's experienced, researched, written, and taught about out-of-body travel since 1987.

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JAS Burgess, M.R.A.S., F.R.G.S.

'Avalokiteswara's Descent into Hell'

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation Journal:

'Comparing the Buddhist Avalokiteswara's Descent into Hell with that of Jesus Christ - Introduction!'

Issue Eight

By Marilyn Hughes

Some people are not aware of the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity and I couldn't help but have a great desire to share this profoundly written article comparing Avalokiteswara's Descent into Hell with that of Jesus Christ.

In Buddhist tradition, Avalokiteswara brought about the tradition of the Bodhisattva's. The Bodhisattva's are known for making the vow to reincarnate until ALL LIVING BEINGS have been liberated from their karma. In Christianity, Christ's death had a similar purpose.

In Buddhism, Avalokiteswara is presented in a few different ways. Sometimes, Avalokiteswara is presented almost purely female; and is loved like the Holy Mother of Christianity. Sometimes, Avalokiteswara is presented with aspects of female and male traits to show that he/she transcended gender and was the Buddhist incarnation of compassion for all living beings.

In Christianity, Christ became a sacrificial lamb also, but He did it on the cross. And His death was meant to free all souls from their sin and give them an opportunity for liberation into the heavenly realms.

There's not much I can add to the following article from James Burgess, so I will leave you to enjoy this very

interesting comparison of two very diverse religions which have more in common than many people realize.

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The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation Journal:
Question and Answer Forum!

Please Send Your Questions to:

magazine@outofbodytravel.org

For Future Inclusion in this Section!

Question from Dr. Chaco Simon, Canada: Do you know which is the real God out of the thousands people talk of?

Marilynn: Hi Dr. Simon, I believe that God has shown Himself to us through many manifestations throughout the aeons, but I can tell you that as I wrote about it in the Mysteries of the Redemption, I was shown beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ was exactly who He said He was.

But I happen to believe that this same Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, could have manifested in other ways or through other means throughout the world throughout the centuries. I have been shown that Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna, Bah'a'ullah, etcetera, were all PROPHETS of God who serve Jesus Christ now in the Royal Family of God. Jesus was different, in that He was a Messiah. I've also been shown that Messiah's have appeared throughout the ages throughout time and throughout the world in many ways, most of them unseen and forgotten. But these messiah's appeared without the same station of Jesus Christ - they came to lead people to God, but they were not a manifestation of God, but rather, perfected souls, so to speak. I believe Gandhi is a great saint

and in the Royal Family of God. But his purposes in this world were more political than religious, but God used him both ways. I've seen him in the spiritual realms, and he is of very high standing in the Royal Family.

So - in a nutshell - "I believe there is One God, and that God is One." I believe that God has allowed manifestations of His presence and or power through various human forms at different times in different places. I believe that He came down from Heaven and became the child Jesus, and affected the means of Redemption for all time. But although God is one, His people - His royal family - are many.

Marilynn Hughes
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The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation Journal:

Different Voices!

This is our section devoted to the writings and opinions of others, which may not reflect the views of author, Marilyn Hughes. Inclusion of any author's writings or work does not denote an endorsement or recommendation in regards to their writings.

Some of these will be individual writings of others on subjects of spiritual interest, other people's out-of-body experiences - some which may agree with and/or contradict the experiences of the author, poems, journals of spiritual transformation, and critiques - both positive and negative opinions and/or analysis, of the author's work.

We choose to include ALL of these because we feel that the ability to discuss our similarities and differences openly is 'ALL GOOD' as GANDHI used to say.

We welcome and encourage your submissions for possible future inclusion in this section, although we stress that we are a non-profit organization and payment is not available:

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We have found that some of the best critiques, analysis, writings and experiences come from people all over the world in different walks of life who are pursuing their spiritual path with passion and are completely unknown.

THANK YOU ALL, whether you agree or disagree with our work, FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO SEEK THE TRUTH IN WHATEVER WAY THAT TRUTH MAY COME TO SEEK YOU!

AVALOKITEŠWARA'S DESCENT INTO THE HELL AVÎCHI (As Compared with Christ's Descent into Hell)

(from the *Kâra.n.da-vyûha*)

Edited by JAS. BURGESS, M.R.A.S., F.R.G.S.

THE NORTHERN BUDDHIST LEGEND OF AVALOKITEŠWARA'S DESCENT INTO THE HELL AVÎCHI.

BY PROF. EDWARD B. COWELL, M.A., CAMBRIDGE.

One of the most remarkable features of the Northern Buddhism, current in Nepal, Tibet, Tartary, and China, as distinguished from the Southern, current in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, is the worship paid to the Bodhisattwa Avalokitešwara.

This Bodhisattwa^[1] is supposed to be the son of Buddha Amitâbha, who reigns in the Western heaven, called Sukhâvatî; to him is attributed the famous formula *Om ma.ni padme hûm*, and he is looked upon as the tutelary saint of Tibet. In China he is worshipped under a female form (corresponding apparently to the Hindu notion of a deity's *śakti*, or personified power), as Kwan-yin, or the Goddess of Mercy; and the Rev. S. Beal has translated the Confessional Service addressed to her, in the second

volume (new series) of the *Journal of the R. A. Society*^[2] (pp. 403-425).

The name and attributes of Avalokiteśwara are entirely unknown to the Southern Buddhists; and his worship is one of the later additions which have attached themselves to the simpler original system, as it spread through India, and ultimately made its way to China and Japan.

We cannot tell when this new deity first rose on the popular horizon; but there are some indications which may help us to approximate in fixing the date. Burnouf has remarked that the earlier and simpler Northern books contain no allusion to this object of worship. "Ce nom n'est pas cité une seule fois dans les Sûtras, ni dans les légendes de l'*Avadâna Śataka*, ni dans celles du *Divya-Avadâna*, tandis qu'il figure au premier rang dans notre *Lotus de la bonne loi*" (*Introd.* p. 115).

Fa Hian, the Chinese traveller, who travelled in India from 399 to 414 A.D., expressly says (ch. xvi.) "men who belong to the Great Translation worship the Prajñā Pāramitā, Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśwara;" and in a subsequent chapter he describes himself as invoking Avalokiteśwara when exposed to a storm during his homeward voyage from Ceylon to China. Hiwen Thsang also (who travelled in India in the seventh century) is well acquainted with this saint, and mentions him in several places. He finds his statue in Kapiśa, south of the Hindu Kush, and in a monastery in Udyāna, and in Kashmir, and he also mentions a celebrated statue on the bank of the Ganges, famed for its power of working miracles.

The two best known Northern works which contain details respecting Avalokiteśwara are the *Kāra.n.da-vyûha*

and the *Saddharma-Pu.n.darîka*; the latter belongs to the collection of nine books which, under the name 'the nine *dharmas*,' is regarded with such veneration in Nepâl. The latter was translated by Burnouf as *Le lotus de la bonne loi*; the text of the former has been recently published at Calcutta, in a native series of Sansk.rit books. The editor does not mention where he found the original MS. from which he has printed his text; but it was probably one of the many MSS. presented by Mr. B. H. Hodgson to the Bengal Asiatic Society, between 1824 and 1839.

The twenty-fourth chapter of the *Lotus* is devoted to the praises of Avalokitešwara. To pronounce his name once is said to be equal in merit to the continual worship of as many Buddhas as there are sands in the sixty-two Ganges; and to invoke his aid in any difficulty or sorrow brings certain deliverance. He is also represented as assuming various forms in different worlds to proclaim the law of Buddha to different creatures; to some he appears under the form of a Buddha; to others of a Bodhisattwa, to others of Brahmâ, Indra, Mahešwara or even of a universal monarch, a Brâhman or a Pišâcha, "in order to teach the law to those beings made to be converted by these respective teachers." The *Lotus* is mentioned by Hiwen Thsang; and when he visits the mountain G.riḍhrakû.ta in South Bihâr, he expressly adds that at the bottom of the southern edge of the mountain there was a stûpa, and "here in olden time Buddha explained the book of the lotus-flower of the law."

The *Kâra.n.da-vyûha* has as its principal topic throughout the glory of Avalokitešwara; and towards the end of the book we have glowing accounts of the efficacy of the celebrated formula attributed to him. The work is found in two different recensions, the one in prose, the other in

verse. The latter has been partly analysed by Burnouf (*Introd.*, pp. 220-231), but it is evidently the more modern version; the MS. of the prose version at Paris, however, was too incorrect for him to attempt to translate it. This defect has now been supplied by the Calcutta text.

The peculiar characteristic of Avalokiteśvara, as worshipped by all the Northern Buddhists, is that he has declared his purpose, under the most solemn oath, to manifest himself to every creature in the universe, in order to deliver all beings from the consequences of sin.^[3]

The first few chapters of the *Kâra.n.da-vyûha* are occupied with a description of Avalokiteśvara's descent into the hell Avîchi to deliver the souls there held captive by Yama, the lord of the lower world. As these seem to me to bear a curious resemblance to the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, I subjoin a translation from the Calcutta text, only occasionally condensing the narrative where we have the usual repetition of the northern Buddhist writings.

The *Kâra.n.da-vyûha* (or 'arrangement of the basket of Avalokiteśvara's excellences') professes to be a narrative by the disciple Ânanda, who was present at the original discourse as uttered by Buddha, and it therefore commences with the usual formula *evam mayâ śrutam*, "thus was it heard by me."

Chapter I.--The work opens with the description of an assembly held in the Jetavana Garden at Śrāvastî, where Buddha is attended by a vast throng of mendicant followers as well as a still more numerous audience from the spiritual world, thousands of Bodhisattvas, and sons of the devas, with Indra, Brahmâsahâmpati, the Sun, the Moon, the Wind, Varuṇa, &c., at their head, with

countless Nâgas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras, with their daughters, and Apsarasas, besides hundreds of thousands of lay devotees of both sexes.

"When the vast assembly was met together, suddenly beams of light issued forth in the hell Avîchi; and having issued forth they reached to the monastery of Jetavana, and decorated the whole place. The pillars appeared to be inlaid with heavenly gems, the upper chambers to be covered with gold, the doors, staircases, &c., to be all of gold, and the grounds outside to be filled with heavenly trees, with golden trunks and silver leaves, and hung with costly garments, pearl wreaths, and all kinds of ornaments, while the eye wandered over lakes filled with water^[4] and various kinds of flowers.

Chapter II.--"Then in the midst of that assembly a noble Bodhisattwa named Sarva.nîvara.navishkambhin, having risen from his seat, and thrown his upper garment over one shoulder and bent his right knee to the ground, putting his hands to his forehead, and turning reverentially towards Buddha, thus addressed him, 'I am filled with excessive wonder, O holy one; whence come these rays? of what Tathâgata are they the visible majesty?'

"Buddha replied, 'This is not the majesty of a Tathâgata^[5]; O noble youth, the glorious Bodhisattwa Avalokiteśwara has entered into the great hell Avichi; and, having delivered the beings there, is entering the city of the *pretas*^[6]; hence is it that these my rays have been emitted.'

"Then the Bodhisattwa Sarva.nîvara.navishkambhin addressed Buddha, 'O holy one, what beings are found in Avîchi? there where no joy (vîchi) is known, does he preach the law? in Avîchi, whose iron realm surrounded

by walls and ramparts is as it were one uninterrupted flame, like a casket of flashing jewels. In that hell is a great wailing cauldron, wherein myriads of beings are thrown; just as kidney beans or pulse sweat rising and sinking in a pot full of boiling water, so do these beings endure corporeal pain in Avîchi. How then, O holy one, does the Bodhisattwa Avalokiteśwara enter there?'

"Buddha answered, 'O noble youth, just as an emperor enters into a garden full of all precious things, attended with all his royal pomp, so Avalokiteśwara enters into the hell Avîchi. But his body undergoes no change. When he approaches the hell, it becomes cool. Then the guards of Yama, bewildered and alarmed, begin to think, 'what is this inauspicious sign which has appeared in Avîchi?' When Avalokiteśwara enters, then there appear there lotuses as large as chariot wheels, and the cauldron bursts open, and within that bed of fire a lake of honey is manifested.

"Then Yama's guards, seizing all manner of weapons, swords, clubs, javelins, &c. and all the defensive armour of hell, repaired to Yama, the lord of justice, and addressed him: 'Let our king know that our field of action^[7] is destroyed, and is become a place of pleasure and filled with all joy.'

"Yama replied, 'What is the reason that your field of action is destroyed?'

"The guards answered, 'Let our lord also know that an inauspicious sign has appeared in Avîchi, all has become quiet and cool, and a man assuming all shapes at will has entered there, wearing matted locks and a diadem, and decked with divine ornaments, with his mind excessively

benevolent, and like an orb of gold. Such is the man who has entered, and immediately on his entrance lotuses have appeared as large as chariot wheels, and the cauldron has burst open, and within that bed of fire a lake of honey is manifested.' Then Yama reflected, 'Of what god is this the majesty? Of Mahêśwara, great in power, or Nârâya.na worshipped by the five oceans, or have any of the other sons of the gods obtained by boon such preëminent reward, and descended to this place, or has some Rākshasa arisen, some rival of Râva.na?' Thus he stood and pondered, and beholding with his divine eye he saw no such power in the world of the gods,^[8] and who else can have such power.

"Then again he looked back to the hell Avîchi, and therein he beheld the Bodhisattwa Avalokiteśwara. Then Yama, the lord of justice, went where he was, and having saluted his feet with his head began to utter his praise. 'Glory to thee Avalokiteśwara Mahêśwara, Padmaśrî, the giver of boons, the subduer, best overlooker of the earth, &c.^[9] Thus having uttered his special praise, Yama thrice circumnambulated round the Bodhisattwa and went out.'

Chapter III.--"Then Sarva.nîvara.navishkambhin thus addressed Buddha, 'When does the glorious Bodhisattwa Avalokiteśwara come back?' Buddha answered, 'Noble son, he has gone out of hell, and has entered the city of the *pretas*. There hundreds of thousand of *pretas* run before him, with forms like burned pillars, tall like skeletons, with bellies like mountains, and mouths like needles' eyes. When Avalokiteśwara comes to the *preta* city, the city becomes cold, the thunderbolt ceases, and the doorkeeper, with uplifted javelin, his hand busy with poison, and his eyes red with anger, suddenly by his power begins to feel

the influence of benevolence; saying, 'I must not have to do with such a field of labour.'

"Then the Bodhisattwa Avalôkiteshvara having beheld that abode of beings, being filled with compassion, caused ten Vaitara.nî rivers to issue from his ten fingers, and ten more from his toes; and likewise in his great compassion rivers of water poured from all his pores down to those afflicted beings. And when the *pretas* tasted that water, their throats became expanded and their limbs filled, and they were satiated with food of a heavenly flavour. Then, regaining human consciousness, they begin to think of worldly things. 'Alas, happy are the men of Jambudwîpa who can seek cool shade, who can always live near their parents and wives; who can cut the sacred staves, and repair the broken and crumbling monasteries and shattered topes; who can always wait on those who recite, write, or read the sacred books, and behold the miracles and various wonderworks of the Tathâgatas, Pratyeka-buddhas, Arhats, and Bodhisattwas.

"Thus meditating, they abandoned their *preta* bodies of punishment, and became capable of attaining their desire. Then from Avalôkiteshvara there issued the precious royal *sûtra* of the 'great translation,' the *kara.n.da vyûha*. Then having split with the thunderbolt of knowledge the twenty-peaked mountain of the delusion which teaches that the body exists,^[10] they were all born in the Sukhâvatî world as Bodhisattwas named Âkânshita-mukhâ.h. Then Avalôkiteshvara, when these beings were released and born in the land of the Bodhisattwas, went out again from the city of the *pretas*.

Chapter IV.--"Then Sarva.nîvara.navishkambhin said to Buddha, 'Does Avalôkiteshvara still delay to come?'

"Buddha answered, 'Noble son, he is maturing the experience of many thousands of myriads of beings; day by day he comes and matures them, there never was such a manifestation of the Tathâgatas as there is of the glorious Bodhisattwa Avalôkiteswara.'"

Buddha then describes an assembly held in a former æon by a Buddha named Sikhin, who sees Avalôkiteswara coming to him with a present of heavenly flowers from Amitâbha. The Buddha Sikhin asks where he is performing his works of merit. Avalôkiteswara replies that he is visiting the innumerable hells in the universe, and that he has resolved that he himself shall not grasp the perfect knowledge of a Buddha until all beings have been not only delivered from punishment, but are settled in the world of Nirvâna.

If we now turn to the second part of the Apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, we find a curious parallel to this legend.

The two sons of Simeon, who are described as having been raised from their graves at Christ's death, are brought before the chief priests. They then call for ink, pens, and paper, and relate how they were in Hades with the fathers, when suddenly "at the hour of midnight, upon those dark places, there arose, as it were, the light of the sun, and shone, and we were all lighted and saw one another." Satan then goes to Hades and tells him of Jesus, his crucifixion and death, and tells him to hold him firmly when he comes. Hades replies that Christ had lately rescued Lazarus,—"I conjure thee both for thy benefit and mine, not to bring him hither; for I think that he is coming here in order to raise up all the dead. And this I say to

thee, by the darkness which we keep, if thou dost bring him hither, none of the dead will be left to me."

While Satan and Hades were thus talking together, there came a great voice like thunder, quoting *Psalms* xxiv. 7. "And when Hades heard, he said to Satan, 'Go forth if thou art able and resist him.' Therefore Satan went forth. Then said Hades to his demons, 'secure well and firmly the brazen gates and the iron bars, and hold down my bolts, and stand upright and watch everything; for if he should enter here, woe will seize us.' On hearing these things, the forefathers all began to reproach him, saying, 'All-devouring and insatiate, open that the King of Glory may come in!..... The voice therefore came again, 'Lift up the gates.' Hades hearing the voice a second time, answered as forsooth not knowing, and said, 'Who is this King of Glory?' The angels of the Lord said, 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.' And immediately at that word the brazen gates were broken and the iron bars were crushed, and all the dead that were bound were loosed from their bonds, and we with them. And the King of Glory entered as a man, and all the dark places of Hades were lighted up. Hades straightway cried, 'We are conquered, woe unto us.' Then the King of Glory seized the chief ruler Satan by the head, and delivered him to the angels, and said, 'Bind with irons his hands and feet and neck and mouth.' Then he delivered him to Hades, and said 'Take him and keep him safely until my second coming.' Then Hades took Satan and said to him, 'Beelzebub, inheritor of fire and punishment, enemy of the saints, by what necessity hast thou contrived that the King of Glory should be crucified, that he should come hither and spoil us? Turn and see that none of the dead is left in me; but all that thou didst gain by the tree of knowledge, thou hast lost it all by the cross.'"

Christ then blesses all the fathers, beginning with Adam, and rises with them in triumphal procession to paradise, where he delivers them to the archangel Michael.

Is the resemblance of the two legends accidental, or is it possible that, in the Buddhist account, we have one of those faint reflections of Christian influence (derived perhaps from Persian Christians settled in western and southern India) which Professor Weber has endeavoured to trace in the doctrine of faith as taught in the *Bhagavad Gîta*, and some of the mediæval schools of the Vedânta? Much must depend on the date of the *Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus*. Maury and Cowper would place it as low as the fifth century, but Tischendorf with greater probability would refer it to the second.^[1] Even if the present form in which we have the legend is interpolated, much of it must surely be of an earlier date, and we find direct allusion to events described there, in the pseudo-Epiphanius' homily in *Sepulchrum Christi*, and in the fifteenth sermon of Eusebius of Alexandria.^[1] At the same time we have no reason to suppose that the Buddhist legend was connected with the earliest worship of Avalôkiteswara. It is not alluded to by the Chinese travellers in India, and the date of the *Kâra.n.da-vyûha* can only be so far fixed, that it seems to have been translated into Tibetan in the ninth century.^[13]--From *The Journal of Philology*, vol. VI. (1876), pp. 222-231.

1. A Bodhisattwa is a potential Buddha, one who has only one more birth before he attains *nirvâna*. Burnouf explains Avalôkiteswara as a barbarous Sanskrit compound, meaning 'le seigneur qui a regardé en bas' (*Introd.*, p. 226).

2. Cf. also the *Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese*, pp. 383-409.]

3. Beal, *Buddhist Catena*, p. 383.

4. This water has a curious epithet *ash.tângopeta-vâri*; does this mean 'water flowing downwards,' *i.e.* prostrate, or endowed with the eight qualities? Burnouf (*Introd.* p. 191) translates it 'vivifiante.'

5. A title of a Buddha.

6. The *pretas* are beings in a state of punishment, and are described as always emaciated and hunger-stricken.]

7. *Asmâka*"m karmabhûmih.

8. In p. 10 l. 20, I read *balam* for *varam*; the best Cambridge MS. has *tachcha dēvanikâyê na paśyati sma îd.raśa*"m *balam*.

9. I omit the remainder of this address, which extends to a page.]

10. For this curious phrase conf. Burnouf, *Introd.*, p. 263, and Childer's *Pâli Dict.* s.v. *sakkâya*.]

11. Quæ omnia conjuncta ejusmodi sunt ut libellum nostrum ex antiquissimo scripto apocrypho secundi sæculi haustum vel transcriptum putem. *Evang. Apocr.* p. 73.

12. The phrase in Athanasius' third sermon *in Arios* reminds one of the legend, though it may be only a rhetorical phrase,--[Greek: *all' oudè dēmis pālin eipein deilian tōn Kúrion òn oi pukerōi tou Adou pthksantes eksafhkan tōn Adhn*].

13. In Csomo Körösi's paper (*Asiat. Res.* vol XX. p. 530) it is said to have been translated by Śākya-prabhā and Ratnarakshita; the former is associated in p. 516 and p. 530 with Bandê-yê-shêsdê, one of the well known Tibetan translators of the 9th century (p. 527).]

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Issue Eight

By Marilyn Hughes

The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!

www.outofbodytravel.org



Author, Marilyn Hughes

The eighth issue of the 'The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation Journal' takes on a fascinating subject in comparing a common experience of Christianity and Buddhism.

In our Question and Answer Section, we answer a question from Dr. Chaco Simon on who is the real God out of all the God's spoken of in history. Our 'Different Voices' section, we have the full article from Professor Edward Cowell, Cambridge University comparing the descent into hell of Avalokiteswara of Buddhism and Jesus Christ of Christianity.

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